A sit-down comic you can stand

By Robin Sherman
Constitution Staff Writer

LIKE CHALK screeching on a blackboard. Like a cat drug through a saxophone. Like fingernail filing.

Not exactly. But Dan Fineman's untrained voice adds a distinctive quality to Atlanta's airwaves every Saturday at 11 a.m. on WREK-FM's (91.1) comedy program, the "Acme Radio Hour."

"People call up here and say, 'That's you, I've heard you before.' Others say I'm really Dr. Demento (Mr. Weirdness of syndicated radio). I say, 'No. I don't work for Warner Bros. I'm not a professional announcer.' I grew up with this voice. It's the one I've always had."

To be sure. Yet somehow the caustic vibrations in his larynx yield a perfect sprightly tone for the kids, and even adults, who would rather listen to a radio comedy show than stay glued to the varied sorts of monsters and robots one finds permeating television fare Saturday mornings. But, *of course*, Fineman would admit he sang for two years in the Georgia Tech Glee Club several years ago.

Fineman has explored the depths of comedy recording, always searching for old standards such as The Smothers Brothers or Abbott and Costello, or new standards like the Ace Trucking Company; or the unusual, like The Kazoos Brothers.

"We don't want to be a homogenized comedy show. We want to be dynamic. It's hard not to offend some of the people some of the time. But we do pretty good, I think," Fineman says. "We're here to entertain people and not to do anything controversial. We want people to have a good time."

Bedecked in a tacky Florida tourist shirt and a straw hat (chewed up a little by a rabbit) this morning, Fineman eases a record onto the turntable. He turns around and brings the microphone closer. He's set.

"Hey kids, it's time for your favorite radio show — WREK's 'Acme Hour!' "

"It's difficult to find comedy that is airable these days," he continues. "So much is spiced with expletives that are not agreeable to the FCC."

At times, Fineman will tape a record and splice out the offensive material. (George Carlin's seven dirty words?) But he admits it is often better not to attempt the chore because much of the comedic value can be lost. A case in point: editing Richard Pryor.

The key to the "Acme Radio Hour" is diversity — the overall programming philosophy of the Georgia Tech student-run station. And the key to diversity for Fineman is planning.

"I try not to play the same thing every week. I get a lot out of it, too. Just being on the air is not rewarding in itself, it's the researching and the hearing of new things," he says.

In fact, he would love to have local comedians submit material for the "Acme Hour."

Fineman has a library of 50 to 60 comedy albums. "A lot of good stuff you can't get anymore. It's really a shame."

All The Smothers Brothers albums, he says, are out of print as are those by Stan Freberg, a leading American satirist ("Today the pits, tomorrow the wrinkles. Sunsweet marches on."). Some Rowan and Martin ("Say goodnight, Dick.") are hard to find.

"Freberg was a big influence on me. There was a time I thought no one could come close to the humor and satire he had," Fineman says. "I like the more cerebral (kinds of comedy), not the slapstick stuff. I like British humor as well."

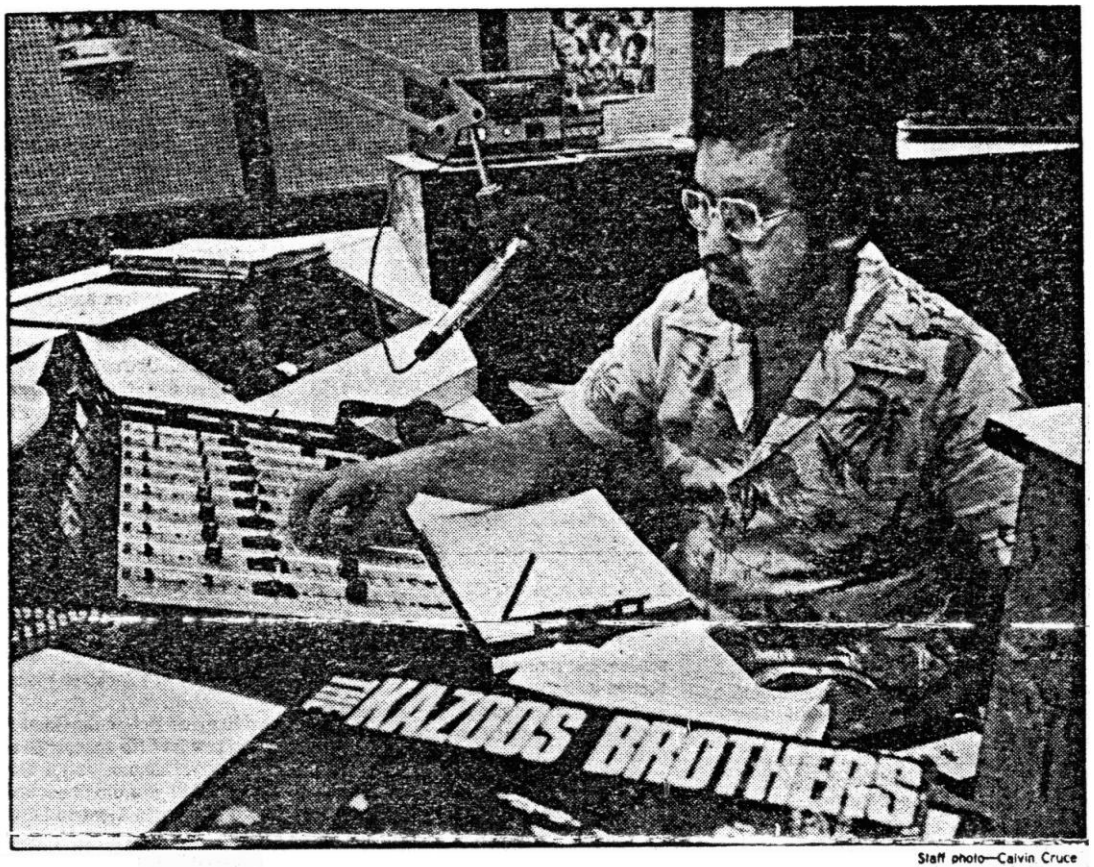
The "Acme Radio Hour" did not originate with Fineman, but he cultivated it shortly after two other Tech students grew tired of the gag after only four shows in spring of 1978.

While completing his bachelor of science in economics, Fineman joined WREK-FM as news director in his senior year after working as editor of Tech's student newspaper, the Technique. He later auditioned for the comedy program and began his stint the following fall.

Now Fineman dabbles in mini-processing for J.C. Penney while he maintains his hobby with the "Acme Radio Hour" once a week.

"And that's 86 degrees on your antiquated Fahrenheit scale."

Perhaps Atlanta's foremost sit-down comedian with a voice cautiously described by another staff member as "bad," Fineman chugs along "just a little sprocket in the giant cog of WREK."



Staff photo—Calvin Cruce

WREK-FM's Dan Fineman hosts the comedy program, 'Acme Radio Hour'